

The following text is my contribution to the book "Shine Your Light – Powerful Practises for an Extraordinary life" co-written with NY Times bestselling authors Janet Bray Attwood, Chris Attwood, Geoff Affleck and Marci Shimoff. The book became a #1 Amazon bestseller in record time and is a recommendable read in its entirety. See more at <http://shinelightbook.com/>

How to survive the unsurvivable

By Kirsten Stendevad

I had spent nine years working with women, helping them make their wildest dreams come true, when I faced my own worst nightmare: My middle son was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. Everything I believed in was suddenly put to the test.

If you're facing or have faced catastrophe in your own life, then I know you'll be able to relate, and hopefully be reminded of our ability to go up instead of down, no matter what.

It was just before Christmas, December 23, 2011. My husband, Esben, had gone to the hospital with Sebastian, our six-year-old, for the fourth time in the past week to find out why he had a sore chest. When I took Esben's place at 3:00 p.m., I looked into the sterile hospital room and saw my child lying in a giant scanning machine with just his little face showing.

When the doctor came out, I could tell something was terribly wrong.

"Is it serious?" I asked. And then it suddenly burst out of me: "Is it cancer?"

Her eyes were dark with pain. "Yes."

My world crumbled.

50 women had just passed their final exam at my International Feminine Leadership Academy (IFLA) certification training. I'd taught them how to create positive transformation for themselves and others. Now it was my turn to be tested. Could I create positive transformation for myself and my family in this seemingly impossible situation?

I looked at my beloved boy, and for a moment only saw his absence. How could this be? MY baby? The one who was born on Valentine's Day and always left flowers for me on my keyboard? Sebastian was a healthy, spirited boy who was smart and popular in school and charmed everyone with his curly golden hair and naughty, freckled smile. Esben and I had done everything we could to create a healthy child, as we also did with Sebastian's two brothers. We had performed sacred cleansing rituals prior to conception and raised him on health food and preventive healing techniques, including those to neutralize negative thoughts and feelings.

Yet here I was in the Children's Cancer Unit at the General Hospital in Copenhagen with tears running down my cheeks. Approximately 100 children a year get cancer in Denmark. There is almost no chance of getting the rare cancer my son had. One would have to work with asbestos for 30 years *and* be exceptionally unfortunate to contract this type of cancer. I wondered, *Are we random victims of life's injustice, or have we done something wrong?* Since no one can know what is true, I chose a story that strengthened me: This is happening for us to find innovative cancer cures for the benefit of all.

I knew I'd have to use all of the knowledge, faith and wisdom I had acquired thus far in life to get through this crisis. I began to think of the principles I taught in my feminine leadership training in a different light. They were now lifelines we would need in this perilous time, starting with the first one:

Principle #1: Don't be a victim! Find solutions by balancing yin and yang.

One of the pillars of my teaching is that women must liberate themselves from the role of victim that we all too often adopt. We can improve both our own world and the world at large by taking a leadership role in exploring new ways to create balance in our lives.

I've come to believe that success, and health, are achieved by balancing yin and yang, feminine and masculine. The common cancer treatments—chemotherapy, surgery and radiation—use only yang, the masculine energy. This is the rational, action-oriented paradigm, which only considers the external factors, so those who survive these treatments often do so with lasting harm. I had to balance yang with yin, the feminine essence, which is about wholeness and the internal aspect of life.

We decided that, since chemo and other yang cancer treatments work *against* the body, they must be complemented with a holistic regimen that works *with* the body and addresses the emotional, spiritual, and energetic levels of life. So we brought in lots of alternative, holistic healing modalities, as well as soul-feeding music, games, delicious health foods and toys: anything that would uplift and delight Sebastian.

Meanwhile, my husband and I looked at all areas of our family life, asking, *Where can we create more balance?* We evaluated our marriage, work habits, exercise habits, diet and ways of thinking and feeling, taking our cue from the IFLA philosophy that we thrive best if we nurture all areas of life and live a life in tune with our inner core.

We felt we made progress, however, we soon met a fundamental challenge: The doctors could not find a clear diagnosis and treatment for Sebastian. After 14 days, despite healing help from holistic experts near and far, the tumor had grown by fifty percent. It was too large for radiation and positioned in a manner that prevented surgery.

"Two more weeks, and he cannot breathe," the doctor said. So we had to start the chemotherapy, even though they still didn't even know the cancer's name.

We had to bring in the second principle.

Principle #2: Pleasure and a constructive mindset are crucial for health and success.

This key concept of the International Feminine Leadership Academy concerns the importance of pleasure and positivity, in part because they increase the yin aspect, which is where the body's self-healing processes take place. I knew we needed to do everything we could to support our vision for a positive outcome, so while Sebastian was having chemo with four of the most toxic substances in the world seeping into his blood, I made him laugh and told him stories about the magical drops that could dissolve the "sour cells." There were only two options: crumble under the weight of powerlessness—or stop judging and focus on creating a joyful, light-hearted atmosphere. I chose the latter.

Sebastian himself was our greatest role model. One minute he could be sad, or angry that it hurt to take a blood test, but the next moment he might be talking about a nice igloo he had built when he was in kindergarten, or a strange name he had heard in the schoolyard. His delight in little things showed me the way to go. We sat together playing Smurf games; I massaged his feet; we slept in the same bed. If happiness in the Now could help with his healing, these moments of pure presence should work wonders.

Family and friends came swarming with mountains of packages and entertaining company. I brought in a pink yoga mat for the hospital room. Because self-care is one of the key concepts of my Feminine Leadership training, I also took a day trip to London to have a change of air and a soothing facial.

Immediately after the first round of chemo was over, I flew Sebastian to one of the best holistic cancer hospitals in Germany.

"*Mein Gott*, he is so poisoned," said the chief doctor. But he was able to remove most of the side effects of the chemo without the use of traditional medicine.

In spite of this success, the German doctors felt that Sebastian's disease was seriously malignant, and they did not dare to take responsibility for his treatment. And so, we returned to Copenhagen and focused on the next principle.

Principle #3: Go for your vision—even if it looks impossible.

On January 27th, just over a month after Sebastian's first diagnosis of cancer, the Danish doctors finally identified it as a rare, highly aggressive pleural form of cancer, never before seen, worldwide, in a child. Chemotherapy might slow the growth, but only for a short while. Survival chance: Zero. Our only hope: Find a miracle. "Miracles are my specialty," I insisted, and refused anything less.

Loving networks of women helping each other to live their dreams has always been the hallmark of the International Feminine Leadership Academy. Through this network we gained access to the best cancer doctors, international healers, alternative centers and innovative healing paths around the globe. Ninety-nine percent said they couldn't save him, but one percent were willing to try.

I flew him to Rome, Geneva and Brussels to see experts, and we imported Japanese fungal medicine, Chinese Chi Lei, Australian heat therapy, and much more.

And all the traveling and experimenting with alternatives seemed to pay off: Sebastian was able to stop taking all pain medications, and outwardly he seemed 100% well! We thought he was finally on the mend.

On February 14th, Sebastian Calvin Kenzo turned seven, and we celebrated his birthday five times. Could this be his last birthday? Was he really getting well or was his good state a respite—a gift from God, so we could remember him as happy and healthy? We did not know, but we focused on our vision: curing the incurable.

It was a special time. Sebastian enjoyed himself with his family and friends and even made much progress with his reading and writing. One day he came home from his grandparents with a bracelet made of heart-shaped beads and a ring of stars. He told me, "I have made this for you, and I have filled it with love, so you'll never get sick."

On March 14, 2012, we were told he was in top condition, an exceptional patient with no side effects from the chemo he was continuing to receive. The chief doctor at the hospital said, "Whatever you're doing, it works!" The only problem: The tumor was still 100% intact.

We continued with our alternative therapies and chose to keep our firm belief that it was possible for him to heal, and Sebastian continued to improve. After a while, he got so strong we were even able to send him back to school! He had some wonderful days with his classmates. But then the nightmare began—his symptoms returned. The doctors saw this as a "progression of the disease." Our holistic experts argued that we were witnessing a "healing crisis" where symptoms worsen before they disappear. I clung to my vision with every cell—I could not afford to deviate from it. But on May 14, the Danish doctor told us Sebastian had only a few weeks left. "Not in my world", I replied, and flew his weak little body to Austria for yet another cutting edge cancer treatment.

I carried him around everywhere. We whispered declarations of love to each other. "I will never move away from home," he promised me and kissed my cheek, a kiss simultaneously so deep yet feather-light.

"I cannot help thinking that I shall die," he said one day, out of the blue. My legs were shaking.

Sebastian transformed from child to sage. He was stoic, uncomplaining, and heroic. He patiently bore all the pain and indignities, while our cadre of therapists, healers and doctors worked night and day to heal him. During this time we tried to fulfill his every desire and fill every second with love, as all five of us lived together in a large hotel room in Austria. At the IFLA, we aspire to live our greatest selves, and I felt that my son invited the whole family to step up to that highest level.

On June 11th, Sebastian took a turn for the worse. The doctors advised us to call his older brother and the grandparents so they could say goodbye. His family and healers gathered around him. It was a room full of heavy hearts—and of endless, unconditional love.

Sebastian lay in our arms through the night. His older brother who had been running desperately around in the hospital, screaming for help for his little brother, now slept with a hand on his shoulder. I wondered if our brave little superhero Sebastian perceived everything we whispered to him to support him on his journey. For my part, I witnessed the same primordial force as when he was born: Metamorphosis.

As the sun cast its first orange rays across the rooftops in the early morning of June 12 2012, my sons breathing became slower. Then even slower. Then our beloved Sebastian Calvin Kenzo became silent and lay completely still. We covered him with soft kisses as long as his little body was warm.

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So, did I realize my vision with pleasure, as I teach other women to do? Did the principles of the International Feminine Leadership Academy work? In many ways, yes. I furthered the work to find the cure for cancer, as we tried alternative methods that complement the traditional ones and experienced how the two systems can work together. I also managed to create a loving six months of farewell for the whole family, from which we all grew.

But I did not fulfill my deepest desire to keep my son alive.

Does this mean that I failed my exam? To answer this, I have had to resort to external examiners. I have asked a number of gurus and spiritual masters, including the holy lamas in Tibet.

The answer goes something like this: Although we are creators, we are also created. A soul comes with a particular mission, and when it is lived out, it travels back to light again. Souls do not think in terms of time. And they ally themselves in advance with the soul groups that can help them with their mission. I am told: *"You cannot stop a soul who is scheduled to go back. He chose to come to you because of your spiritual mind. He stayed as long as he could because he loved you so much."*

Perhaps the biggest lesson I learned is that I have more access to feminine power when I am open and receptive to the flow of life, than when I am resisting it. I thought I would die if my child died. But to my surprise I continued to breathe, even as I laid his body in a small coffin, said goodbye in front of 200 people in the church, and saw his [earthly remains](#) be lowered into the ground.

I knew I had to keep using the IFLA principles, this time to determine whether my life would become better or worse from here. Sometimes I have howled like a she-wolf in the moonlight because Hell is only a thought away. But so is gratitude that Sebastian was ever here with us. I am also grateful for the countless new

openings of my heart, mind and spirit I have gained by facing the immense pain. I imagine that my son is in Paradise, and I choose to create Heaven on Earth now, as my other children deserve a happy mother.

I can focus on what I am missing, or on what I am receiving, like the experience of communicating, even now, with his beautiful soul. Many of the tools I teach continue to help, such as the practices that allow me to let the emotions run through me, instead of creating blocks.

I miss my son on Earth, but I feel truly blessed to experience his everlasting presence in my heart. Something in me understands that, as long as we love, it is not possible to lose.

Kirsten Stendevad, CEO of Illumina International, is an expert in 21st century leadership paradigms, which she has been teaching leaders with and without titles since 2003. The co-author of six trendsetting bestsellers about innovative and visionary leadership, she has also given workshops on these topics at Harvard Business School, MIT, and McKinsey & Co., among others.

Kirsten is well known among the creative class as a transformative role model, a community leader, and an inspiring mentor, not least for female changemakers and entrepreneurs. Her latest business book, The Future is Feminine, will soon be available in English. Also trained as a kundalini yoga teacher and evolutionary coach, Kirsten lives in Copenhagen, Denmark, with her husband and three sons, two on Earth and one in Heaven. She has been greatly helped by her eldest son's book, How to Have an Invisible Brother, available at davidcozmo.com. You can reach Kirsten at www.kirstenstendevad.com.